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BY: BRIAN CLADOOSBY, JEFFERSON KEEL, JOE GARCIA, TEX HALL, SUSAN MASTEN & W. RON ALLEN

NCAI Presidents: Harper Is a Role Model for Indian Country

We are living in historic times for Indian Country. As we are still celebrating the confirmation of Diane Humetewa, the first Native American woman who will serve as a Federal Judge, there is another opportunity for a historic 'first' at our fingertips....

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5/28/14

BY: STEVE PAVLIK | Billy Frank: In Memory of a Nisqually Fisherman

The world changed forever with the passing of Billy Frank, Jr. Billy was a human rights activist, fearless defender of tribal sovereignty and fishing rights, and environmental champion who spoke not only for his beloved salmon but for all natural life that exists within the beautiful Salish Sea region that he called home. Billy was a national treasure.

Billy is undoubtedly best known for his role in the Northwest "fish wars" - the struggle by tribes throughout the Puget Sound to force the State of Washington and the federal government to honor and respect treaties signed in 1854-55 that acknowledged the inherent right of tribes to fish at "all of the usual and accustomed" places. Billy was first arrested for "illegal" fishing at the age of 14, the first of more than 50 such encounters with law enforcement. In the end, the sacrifices made by Billy and his fellow fisher men were successful, and in 1974 resulted in the landmark decision handed down by U.S. District Court Judge George Boldt in U.S. v Washington. Most important in this decision was that tribes were acknowledged to have the right to one half of the harvestable fish. A later U.S. Supreme Court decision would uphold the Boldt decision in its entirety

In 1981, Billy was named chair of the Northwest Indian Fishing Commission, a position he held until his death. Billy's open personality and willingness to work with all parties, and most importantly the universal trust that all member tribes had in him, allowed him to lead the effort to fulfill one of the goals of the Boldt decision, that tribes assume their rightful role as co-managers of salmon and other natural resources.

Over the years Billy emerged as one of the most powerful voices in Indian Country - a voice with national and increasing international recognition. He was the recipient of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Distinguished Service Award, the Albert Schweitzer Prize for Humanitarianism, an honorary degree from Northwest Indian College, and the Indian Country Today's American Indian Visionary Award.

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And while Billy spent much of his time traveling back and forth across the country, he always remained a man of the Salish Sea. He never forgot his initial calling, “to speak for the salmon.”

Billy was part of that “greatest generation” of Indians who changed not only the face of Indian Country, but of a nation. They did so with courage and humility. They took the issues seriously, but never themselves.

The Billy that I knew was the most generous, gracious, caring person I’ve ever known. To meet Billy was to know him, to know him was to love him. He always greeted you like a long lost brother with the warmest of handshakes or a massive bear hug accompanied with loud, “It’s good to see you!” that made you feel the center of the universe. These greetings were dished out to first time acquaintances as generously as to old friends. Billy was the ultimate “people’s person” whose caring for others was true and genuine.

I remember sitting in the back of the room with Billy at one of our annual Vine Deloria, Jr. Indigenous Studies Symposia—an event he never missed. We were in between speakers when one of my students, a tall young woman sporting a rather colorful and flamboyant Mohawk—complete with nearly shaved head—entered, walked across the room, and took a seat. Billy’s eyes focused on her immediately. He stared very intently for the longest time at her before nudging me and asking me who she was. He continued to look at her before finally bursting out, “God damn it, I love her hair!” That was Billy. Always looking at the person, seeing the beauty and promise in everyone. Later I introduced Billy to the girl—Billy was, of course, her hero—and the two talked for quite some time. Every time I saw Billy after that, he would inquire as to how she was doing.

I met Billy through my relationship with Vine Deloria, Jr. Vine was one of Billy’s closest and dearest friends. Vine’s pet name for Billy was “Billy Jack,” a reference to the iconic movie character of the 1970s played by Tom Laughlin (*Billy Jack*, *The Trial of Billy Jack*), who like Billy, always seemed to be getting beaten up by law enforcement and thrown in jail for defending the helpless. At the 2012 Deloria Symposium we presented him with an authentic Billy Jack hat- the old Navajo style hat - and Billy wore it the rest of the day!

Billy was one of the people who pushed me to leave my beloved Arizona and accept a faculty position at Northwest Indian College. One of his selling points: “Think of the hell we could raise!” Unfortunately Billy and I never had the chance to raise much hell, but I did have the opportunity to work with him on a number of occasions. Billy was a friend to Northwest Indian College—a part of our family—he often volunteered to speak to my classes, especially my class on fishing rights. Billy in a classroom—or anywhere for that matter—was a force of nature. He held nothing back when he spoke. Well known for his “colorful” language, he always spoke with fire and passion. He would bring to an end many of his talks by thrusting his index finger in front of him and reminding his audience to always “stay the course.”...

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5/18/14

Billy Frank Jr.: A World Treasure (1931 - 2014)


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BY SUZAN SHOWN HARJO | 5/15/14

“I was the go-to-jail guy.” That’s how Billy Frank, Jr., (Nisqually) often described his role during the treaty fishing rights struggle in the Pacific Northwest of the 1960s and ‘7...



History Will Always Treat Well the Life of Billy Frank Jr.

BY RICHARD WALKER | 5/14/14

Billy Frank Jr.’s funeral was less a time of mourning and more a time of celebration for all he did in defense of treaty rights and Native sovereignty and the environment...



Billy Frank Jr.: An Indigenous Legend and One of the Best Human Beings Ever

BY GYASI ROSS | 5/13/14

I know news cycles quickly move on to the “next big story.” But we can’t do that with Billy Frank, Jr. He deserves a LOT more time...



Live As Billy Did: Passionately Fighting For Our People, Native People

BY BRIAN CLADOOSBY, NCAI PRESIDENT | 5/13/14

Last week, the nation suffered a great loss as Billy Frank, Jr. walked on. There is no better example of what it means to be a modern tribal leader than Billy...



Honor the Treaties: Cherokee Freedmen Complicate Native Rights Mantra

BY JENNI MONET | 5/13/14

It was Monday, May 5 when news began to spread that Indian country had lost one of its greatest treaty rights activists, Billy Frank Jr...



NIGA’s Stevens: Frank a Master at Building Unity and Consensus

BY ERNEST L. STEVENS, JR. | 5/9/14

In February of this year, Indian tribes in the northwest celebrated the fortieth anniversary of United States v. Washington ...



Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe Remembers Billy Frank Jr.

BY ICTMN STAFF | 5/9/14

Turtle Island is still mourning over the news that Billy Frank

Jr. walked on earlier this week...

BY: CYNTHIA IYALL | **Billy Frank Jr: Everyone's Uncle**

"Every time we carry an eagle feather, that's sovereignty. Every time we pick berries, that's sovereignty. Every time we dig roots, that's sovereignty," said Nisqually Tribal elder Billy Frank Jr. who passed away earlier this week at the age of 83....

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5/8/14

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Services Planned for Billy Frank Jr.

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